DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 172 CG 012 740

AUTHOR Gutmann, David
TITLE Personal Transformations in the Post-Parental Period: A Cross-Cultural View.
PUB DATE Feb 78
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (Washington, D.C., February, 1978); Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Development; Androgyny; Cultural Context; *Developmental Stages; Individual Development; *Middle Aged; Models; *Parent Role; *Sex Role; Sociocultural Patterns; Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Aging; *Parenting

ABSTRACT

Using a transcultural perspective this model of the post-parental years assumes a "parental imperative" perspective of the entire life cycle and, thus, analyzes the post-parental years in relation to the pre-parental and parental years. Through this perspective, young parents recognize needs of infants for security, and select those sex-role assignments responding to infant needs. But as parents enter middle-age, the sense of "parental emergency" phases out, the rationale lessens for maintaining repression of sensual and dependent strivings (men) or aggressive strivings (women), and there takes place a transcultural "return of the repressed" wherein both sexes can live out the potentials they abandoned earlier in the task of parenting. While there is a heightened assertion of the right of both parents to be androgynous, this post-parental crisis of narcissism need not become pathological. Rather, it offers the potential to bring about revitalization of the self. (Author/CKJ)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

HARD COPY NOT AVAILABLE

CG

# PERSONAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE POST-PARENTAL PERIOD:

# A CROSS-CULTURAL VIEW

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. Gutmann

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

David Gutmann, Ph.D.
Northwestern University Medical School

Paper presented at the Washington, D.C., meetings
of the American Association for the Advancement of Science
February 1978

ED158172

Unlike the other speakers, I will not discuss a particular piece of research, with a particular population. Rather, I will talk about a model, a way of thinking about the second half of the life cycle, that has been developing in my mind ever since I began working, as a graduate student, in the field of later life studies. Thus, I will report, quite speculatively, on perspectives and frameworks, rather than documented findings. These have been discussed elsewhere. The ideas are based on cross-cultural aspects of aging, as well as my own field studies among the middle-aged and older men of the Navajo, Mayan, and Druze societies.

## The Parental Axis of the Human Life Cycle

We can view the period of middle life from two quite distinct vantage points. Our common culture provides one station; and the transcultural perspective provides the other. Each observational base reveals a different landscape. Most commonly, we look at middle life from our native cultural platform, and see it in terms of the roles, constraints, behaviors, and expectations that are routinely associated with that life period in our *particular* society. But this parochial sighting on middle age reveals a rather dreary landscape: in a society where the cultural norms are typically set by the young and by those who wish to be young, the middle life period is seen--in contrast to the earlier segments of the life cycle--as a time of inevitable and

CG 012740

irretrievable loss--loss of opportunity; of virility or fertility; of health and beauty; and of family ties, e.g., the "empty nest." Inevitably, psychological problems occurring in middle age are understood as reactions to or side effects of these deprivations, these *insults*.

But when we move to a higher pedestal, one that permits us to look across an *array* of disparate cultures, then we begin to escape the constraints that culture itself puts on our vision. From there we discover that, despite all the influences of parochial culture, the human life cycle has a shape of its own, intrinsic to itself. The essential form of the species-typical human life cycle emerges from the noise and clutter introduced by particular cultures; it is revealed as a system whose dynamic organization is not immediately perceivable, but only revealed across time. In this entity called the life cycle, each part affects all others; the early stages affect the later ones, and the later stages cast their shadows on those that come before. Thus, the child's play rehearses the adult that he will become, and the adult's play memorializes the child that he has been. Freed by the comparative method from the biassing effects of the immediate culture, the life cycle emerges in its own right, and establishes its own, more universal norms. These species norms provide a new genotypic context, external to culture, for understanding the period of middle age in our own society.

One basic armature of the life cycle, masked by our cultural emphasis on individual self-fulfillment, is formed around *parenthood*. There is a parental imperative that orders and energizes the human life cycle from the earliest years until well into middle age. This is seen most clearly in coherent, organized societies, where children are

early on trained to parenthood by parents who give them much responsibility for the care of their younger sibs. By the same token, for adults of *both* sexes, parenthood seems to represent the point at which individual satisfaction intersects with species needs. For most adult humans, parenthood is still the ultimate source of the sense of *meaning*. For the majority of adults, the nagging question, "What does life mean? What is it all about?," is automatically answered once they become parents. This is not to deny that adults are also involved in growing themselves, in actualizing their own potentials, as well as those of their children; the human life cycle has an idiosyncratic and individual, as well as a species axis. But in our society we fix our attention on the self-improvement axis, and thus come to regard mid-life as a period of stalemate, and loss; but the transcultural perspective reveals the species, parental axis of the life cycle, and--paradoxically--thereby reveals some hitherto unremarked *developmental* or growth possibilities on the *individual* plane, in middle life. Thus, there is a strange dialectic to the life cycle. While species demands on the individual may appear to be antagonistic to full *individual* development, they are also a precondition for such development; and the growth possibilities of the life cycle in later life only stand out in bold relief when we slip out of our own cultural bindings, with all their emphasis on individual enhancements; and individual failure.

In keeping with this relativistic view of the human life cycle, before outlining a developmental approach to the mid-life period, I will briefly discuss those earlier stages that are particularly relevant for the post-parental years.

Applying the "parental imperative" perspective to the life cycle,

some rough and fairly universal natural divisions are immediately revealed: life begins with a period of being actively parented; followed by a period in which there is basic training and practice of those skills and capacities which lead to separation and autonomy from the parents; followed by periods of active preparation for mating and parenthood; followed by a period of parenthood; followed by a post-parental period; and finally, at the end, a period of *termination*, in which the aging individual, weakened and close to death, undergoes a kind of final reparenting at the hands of various authorities, including doctors, nursing home personnel, and the gods.

## The Requirements of Parenthood

Parenthood begins in childhood, in the third period of the life cycle; when children are first actively trained for parenthood. We can better understand the inculcation of sex differences in early socialization by considering the basic requirements of the parenting function. Again, consistent with the dialectic nature of the life cycle, these are based on the essential needs of vulnerable infants and children for physical and emotional security. The child needs the assurance of nourishing food, of shelter against the elements, and of protection against enemies and predators; but physical safeguards do not have their intended effect unless they are provided and maintained by *reliable*, trustworthy parenting individuals who clearly convey to the infant that he or she is at the center of their concern, and that care is predictable under all average expectable circumstances. A large body of observation and experimentation with human and primate infants has demonstrated that emotional as well as physical care is vital to growth: the infant who is adequately cared for physically, but who is not given a loving welcome to the world will probably not

thrive; he will be terribly vulnerable to diseases that normally reared babies can shrug off, and he will not grow in turn to be the adequate parent of viable children. By the same token, a mother's love cannot substitute for severe malnutrition, or ward off an enemy bullet. Though the two forms of nurture support and reinforce each other, the givers of physical and emotional care are in some important degree different from each other: we call them mothers and fathers. Given the average expectable conditions of relative scarcity and relative danger under which our species evolved (conditions, by the way, under which most of mankind still lives), the *same parent* cannot adequately meet both the physical and the emotional requirements of the young and vulnerable child. Thus, marked gender distinctions have evolved, most clearly seen among young parents, which correspond to the child's need for distinct forms of physical and emotional care. From a species perspective, the male, who can inseminate many females, is much more expendable than the female, who generally bears only one child at a time; perhaps as a consequence, the male is the perimeter animal, assigned the task of providing the kinds of physical security that are mainly found or defended on the physical and economic frontiers of the community. By ranging far in the search for food, in the pursuit of enemies, or in defense of the group's perimeter, men keep the communal center, where the emotive work goes on, intact. The task of the father moves him beyond reach and hail of the child; providing physical security he is automatically disqualified from providing emotional security. The same iron constraint holds true for the mother, whose responsibility for providing emotional security ties her to a zone roughly corresponding to the carrying power of her child's cry, a zone in which physical security is not usually won or guaranteed. If she moves far beyond that zone, in emulation of men, then

she ceases to be the reliable and predictable presence who nurtures the sense of basic trust.

This basic gender division in parenting responsibilities is recognized by most subsistence level societies, with standard consequences for their socializing practices in the third period of the life cycle. Thus, Barry, Bacon, and Child (1957) have abstracted data on socialization from ethnographic reports of 110 separate subsistence societies which--while they differ greatly in cultural terms--consistently recognize the female responsibility for emotional security, and the male responsibility for physical security; and with great unanimity they sponsor, through their training practices, the psychological traits that underwrite successful performance in these distinct assignments. Cross-culturally, Barry, Bacon, and Child find that central themes in female socialization are nurturance, responsibility, and, to a lesser degree, obedience to men and to older authorities generally. By contrast, male children are almost universally socialized toward achievement and self-reliance. Thus, girls are confirmed in the psychological counterparts and role components of the mothering orientation, while boys are confirmed in the drive for achievement and exploit that will impel them beyond the home, and in the self-reliant qualities that will sustain them in these sorties. In many societies, the *rite de passage* is applied as a test of the young man's successful attainment--the passage from the mother's world into the father's world--in these terms. Thus, each sex is trained to amplify, to transform into executive capacities, and to *enjoy* the emotional potentials that are to an important degree declared off-limits for the other sex. Men are prepared for life on the perimeter of the community, while women are prepared to live in, to enjoy, and to maintain the affectional center of the community.

## Culture and Parenthood

It has been argued that this model is outworn, and applicable only to life on the fast-vanishing frontier; but this critique comes from urban sophisticates who have not only lost the frontier, but also the awareness of a vital, pervasive, and reliable culture. That is, the parental imperative and the sex-typed role assignments that derive from this mandate are not only responsive to the condition of physical hardship; they are also underwritten by a coherent culture. The growth of a parental attitude *is* a developmental event; but, like any other form of maturation, it does not develop in a vacuum, *sui generis*, but requires a sponsoring milieu, an average expectable environment. A culturally organized social life is the necessary context for the maturation of the parenting stance.

Culture can be seen as a manifestation of social living that functions so as to provide the normative guidelines for social living, but also to provide the *meanings* that individuals require if they are to successfully tolerate the restrictions on personal freedom and self-expression that are required, of both sexes, by parenthood. Whatever its value content, each culture can be seen to have a sacred as well as a secular aspect: the secular aspect consists of the system of normative rules and expectations that define roles and their proper performance; the sacred aspect consists of those collective representations, the compelling mythic images that relate significant portions of human activity to their sacred, *totemic* exemplars. The secular aspect of culture is the source of direction, but also of constraint; the sacred or totemic aspect of culture is the source of personal meaning, identity, the sense of *centrality* that makes conformity to role expectations or parental tasks tolerable and even

desirable. That is, in a society which maintains both the secular and the totemic aspects of culture, proper behavior in an assigned role *links* the conforming, proper individual to the great, powerful, and excellent archetypes that are the mythic extension and counterpart of that behavior. Thus, conformity imposes a tax on the self and its various potentials; but *that same conformity* implies a behavioral connection to the central, mythic order. Through the sacrifice of self-potentials, the conforming individual acquires a sense of *identity* with the transpersonal mythic order, and a refreshing sense of the mythic center within the self. In this bi-cameral ordering of culture, many potentials for gratification are taken from the self, but self-esteem, of the sort which makes the sacrifice possible and even desirable, is the inevitable payoff.[1]

Our own society maintains the normative, secular aspect of culture, in that we educate our young, quite strenuously, for various roles and specializations; but without the mythic buttressing of socialization, we find that the young are increasingly unwilling to accept the conformity that is vital to reliable role performance, or even to undertake the transformations of egotism and aggression that make for a viable social existence. As a consequence, the demands of the self for full expression

---

1. Put in another way, the bi-cameral culture makes possible the transformations of *narcissism* that are required if reasonable social life, including parenthood, is to go forward; ultimately then, it functions so as to protect the social order against the inroads of unmodified aggression and narcissism. *Via* the *internal* institutions of identity and the superego, narcissism and aggression are put to the service of parenthood and the social order. One might say that the superego, the more primitive psychic institution, memorializes the transformations of narcissism and aggression that take place in early life, under the wing of the parents; while the identity structures memorialize the transformations of narcissism that take place in adolescence, under the aegis of culture in its mythic aspect.

through all modes and all zones become paramount, and young men and young women now insist on maintaining title to their omnipotentiality, their access to both "male" and "female" forms of experience and gratification, even at the height of parenthood.

## The Chronic Emergency of Parenthood

True enough, in most cultures, and prior to parenthood, young men and young women are allowed some freedom to live out their omnipotentiality, to indulge their full and overlapping range of psychic potentials. Thus, unmarried girls are often permitted to be tomboys, while young men are permitted to live out the extremes of *their* nature: they can be offhandedly daring and self-denying one day, lazy and self-pitying the next. The essential difference as regards sex role polarization between traditionalist and secular cultures such as ours shows up with the entry into parenthood, the onset of that chronic period of emergency that we know as parenthood. Particularly in traditional cultures, less so in ours, the evident vulnerability of the human infant provokes a state of crisis in both parents, and brings about the mobilization of the structures, the sexual polarities, that were laid down by early sex role training.

Incidentally, while we recognize the profound personality changes that take place in women with the advent of motherhood, we have not recognized the degree to which men are responsive to the parental emergency. Time and again, in the course of my field work in various cultures, I have been struck by the degree to which corresponding changes are acknowledged by men. Quite commonly, respectable, hard-working peasants have admitted that they were wild young men: "I didn't give a damn for myself of anybody else"; but when I ask, "I see that you are different now. What happened?," they typically respond, sometimes with

a rueful shrug, "I got married. I had kids."

For young fatners, there takes place a kind of instrumentalizing of the self: they tame the extremes of their nature, deploying aggression toward production, curbing their passive tendencies, and generally accepting, even with good humor, the responsibilities and sacrifices that come with the productive stance. During the period of early parenthood, younger men strive toward creating and controlling the sources of security for themselves and particularly for their dependents: they work very hard to increase flocks, fields, or business clienteles; and they do not indulge the "softer" yearnings toward comfort and pleasure that would interfere with their effectiveness in these security-giving parental roles. In effect, they keep out of their behavior those passive-dependent promptings which could prove lethal to their children. These dangerous yearnings are further handled by conceding them to the objects of their own nurturance, to their wives and children, by living out vicariously, through them, the pleasure in *being* nurtured. The wife and the children become external representations of the "passive" yearnings that father must give up in order to provide physical security to others.

By the same token, the wife concedes to her husband the more assertive potential of her own nature. Her aggression, if openly indulged, could destroy the relationship with the husband, on whom she and her children must rely; furthermore, if mothers permitted the open display of quite understandable anger toward continually demanding children, they might do them irreparable emotional and even physical damage. Consequently, female aggression is repressed during the mothering period, and lived out vicariously, through identification with the aggression prowess of the husband. In effect then, the rigid

sex-role distinctions of young and middle adulthood serve to convert dangerous intra-community male and female aggression into useful extra-communal, outwardly directed aggression. That is, *via* his role as husband and father, the father becomes the repository of the wife's aggression as well as his own, and literally exports that aggression away from the vulnerable children, the vulnerable domestic core of the community, and discharges it along the outer defense line of the community against enemy, prey, and physical challenges.

In sum, the available evidence strongly suggests that the needs of vulnerable children for physical and emotional security are a formidable stimulus to young parents, and bring about the role assignments by gender that match the infant's need. Each sex shrinks the range of its investments toward those roles and matching sentiments that are in conformity with their particular parental responsibility; the blunted aspects of self are conceded to and lived out vicariously through identification with the other parent.

## Standing Down from the Parental Emergency

Feminists angrily attack such conceptions, on the grounds that they limit women to the cultivation of a reduced set of qualities; worse yet, qualities that are discredited in our culture. They fear that by conceding the inevitability of sex differences for the earlier years, they accept disparagement and limitation for women over the entire life span. But the transcultural data gathered by myself and other observers indicate that, as regards sex differences, the past is not prologue. The feminists' critique is based on our own cultural perspective, which presents the periods of middle and later life as a concatenation of endings and terminations; but the comparative or species view, which reveals the developmental features of the life cycle, suggests, quite

strongly, that aging does not *only* bring endings--paradoxically, it also brings new beginnings. Thus, as parents enter middle-age, and as children take over the responsibility for their own security--and, in well run societies, even the security of their parents--the chronic sense of parental emergency phases out, and there is less rationale for maintaining the massive repression of sensual and dependent strivings in the case of men or aggressive strivings in the case of women. As a result, there takes place in both sexes a transcultural "return of the repressed," in which the psychological structures established by men and women in response to the parental emergency are in effect dismantled. The general consequence of this period of mid-life, post-parental relaxation is that both sexes can afford the luxury of living out the potentials and pleasures that they had to abandon early on, in the service of their particular parental task. An impressive turnover of sex roles takes place, wherein there is some relinquishment of those personal qualities that were previously conserved for the self, in exchange for those that were partialled out to the mate. Thus, men begin to live out directly, to own as part of themselves, some of the qualities of sensuality and tenderness--in effect, the "femininity"--that were previously repressed in the service of productive instrumentality, and lived out indirectly through the wife. Reversing the usual masculine priorities, post-parental men become more interested in community rather than in agency: they become particularly engaged by food, ir pleasant sights and sounds, and in supportive, warm human contacts. By the same token, older women reclaim from their husbands the aggressive qualities that the men are abandoning--the assertion that can no longer damage their young. Even in the patriarchal Druze culture, older women become more intrusive, more domineering, more

"political," and less sentimental. Like men, they begin to live out the hitherto closeted duality of their own nature, and as each sex becomes to some degree what the other used to be, there is ushered in the normal unisex of later life.

## The Post-Parental Crisis of Narcissism

In effect, as parents recapture their lost omnipotentiality, they are reflecting reduced inner controls, but also heightened egocentricity: following parenthood, there is a tendency for the individual to assert his or her right to be both masculine *and* feminine, to be--like the adolescent, who has not yet accepted adult responsibility and limitation--*omnipotential*. During the period of active parenthood, these grandiose claims to be the all-containing center are typically lived out--for both sexes--through children. Like any other important human potential, narcissism also has its constructive as well as its destructive aspects. Until recently, psychoanalysis has stressed the anti-social phrasings of narcissism, but when we consider the requirements of successful parenting, we come to recognize the positive consequences of this important human potential.

In its broadest sense, the terms "narcissism" refers to the capacity--perhaps limited to our species--for idealization: of the self, or of some other. We have seen that culture brings about a transformation of narcissism, such that the social, collective institutions are idealized in place of the self. The transformations of narcissism that are mediated by culture guarantee the viability of the social life; and the transformations of narcissism that are mediated by parenthood guarantee the viability of children. In effect, the child's sense of basic trust, vital to his healthy psychological development, pivots on the fact that the parents have idealized him, and that they

are ready to surrender their personal claims--even to life--in His favor.[2] But as children grow up, though still loved, they are less available as repositories for parental narcissism: they have declared their humanness, hence their own limitations, and they have separated themselves, both physically and emotionally, from their parents. As a consequence, older parents are less apt to make totalistic demands for their children, and they may, as in their own childhood, restate such claims for themselves. Accordingly, there is a mid-life crisis of egocentricity, such that emeritus parents may become, in effect, their own children. Men in later life may express their self-concern through the passive mode, demanding the right to be cared for, while women might express egocentricity through the active mode, through insisting on the right to be in charge of their relevant domain. For both sexes, the heightened self-concern can take the form of pettiness, irritability, and hypochondria--the digestion, the bowel movements, the articulation of the limbs--all these can become a source of fascination to the older person, if not to his audience. Endless reminiscence is another possibility, as the older person, unable to dramatize his present depleted self, seeks self-confirmation in an idealized past. This perspective on the self is often escalated into a world view: the present, that belongs to the young, is full of weakness and corruption; and only the past knew virtue and heroism. Unfortunately, the self is reinvested precisely at the time when it is more prone to suffer

---

2. The parents' idealization of the child is sponsored, in the mother's case, by the fact that the infant is her self-extension: it literally grew in her belly. And it is sponsored in the father's case by the fact that the child is formless and has not yet declared its own nature or its own limitations. As such, the infant supports the *illusion* of omnipotentiality, and thus becomes a vehicle for whatever grandiose fantasies the father might still entertain.

losses--and these are experienced by the egocentric older individual as gross personal insults.[3]

## The Healing Transformations of Later Life

But the psychic potentials that are released in the post-parental life phase need not become the cornerstone of pathology. Again, as in adolescence, a strong, bi-cameral culture functions so as to transform the potentials that are released by the ending of parenthood into ego executive capacities of the personality. Particularly in the case of men, the traditional society underwrites the *developmental* implications of post-parenthood. In effect, traditional culture mediates between the developmental genotypes and their phenotypic outcomes so as to reveal the positive potentials that are inherent in the post-parental phase of life. The transformation efficacy of the bi-cameral culture has to do with the fact that it maintains two conceptions of power, pragmatic power and sacred power, each one particularly suited to a special season of the life cycle. Thus, pragmatic power is tangible, available to the senses, and lodged in the muscles. It is the energy of the sexual body, the energy of the *young*. But the ultimate life sustaining and life destroying *sacred* powers originate *beyond* the mundane body and the mundane community; they are lodged in the various domains of supernatural power that surround the pragmatic community. And it is the task of the older man, who is no longer active on the physical perimeter of the community, to move out to the spiritual perimeter, and to collect or harvest sacred power for the use of his

---

3. Incidentally, modern psychiatry is deficient in that it concentrates on the irreversible losses of the older person, and fails to treat the heightened but reversible narcissism that renders these losses so poignant, and so destructive.

community. To repeat, this is not a task for promethean young men: they would offend the gods and bring disaster on the community and on themselves. The power brokers who man the sacred perimeter of the community must, in their own presence, be metaphors of the "good power" that they would attract. Roheim cites much data from preliterate societies confirming that the power broker typically exhibits abasive and even masochistic behavior before the gods. Accordingly, in the traditional and religious community, it is the older men, cleansed of sex and aggression, humble in bearing, who intercede for the good influences of the gods, without offending the divinity. What might appear to be passivity and weakness in our society becomes the very basis of the older man's social and personal worth in the traditionalist culture. In effect, the folk culture transforms the older man's passivity and "femininity" into the very pivot of his renewed identity and social power: there, the old man who is too weak to work can still be a vital link--precisely *because* he lacks pragmatic, muscular power--to the awesome *mana* of the gods. Emptied of pragmatic power, the older man becomes a fit vessel for sacred power, and his blessing can uplift and his curse can blast with a force, borrowed from the gods, that was not available to his younger self.

The bi-cameral culture that transforms seeming weakness into an age-appropriate version of strength can also transform the potentially debilitating narcissism of later life into the idealizations that sustain self and society. Instead of idealizing his own history, the older traditionalist can idealize the mythic origins of his society; instead of idealizing his own fussy, compulsive rituals, he can idealize the rituals that bind him and his community to the gods; and instead of demanding omnipotentiality for himself, he can idealize the all-powerful,

all-including gods. Finally, he can idealize the tradition that exemplifies the mythic theme of the culture, the tradition under whose discipline he has lived his life, and that he now exemplifies. From this vantage point of self-transcendence, death loses its personal sting; what is important is not the persistence of the self, but the persistence of the gods and the traditions that reflect their nature. The special serenity that we call *wisdom* of the aged, is a by-product, a fall-out from these fortuitous age-graded transformations.

In the traditional society, women are less apt to manage their own developmental transformations *via* the sacred sphere; ritual and religion are more apt to be the special province of men at all ages. In a secular society, the agentic older woman is apt to step boldly into the arena of domestic, and even community political power. But in the more traditional society, older women move toward power not in their own name, but through their oldest sons. Again and again we find the recurrent pattern: the father, though putatively the head of the family, moves off to the company of priests and prayerful men, and leaves the management of practical affairs to a *junta* composed of his aging wife and his oldest son. In effect, the mother makes *her* play for power through her identification with the ambitious son who has become the outward metaphor of her own emergent "masculinity." She does not--as she once did with her husband--passively identify with the son's prowess; rather, she is the power behind the throne, the dowager who schemes and runs interference for her son's advancement. Where her husband passively identifies with sacred power, the wife is more apt to more actively enact her identification with pragmatic power, in the person of her son.

I bring up these examples of age transformations in the traditional

society for a purpose. I am not a Rousseauan; I do not mean to contrast urban venality with rural goodness and wholeness. Rather, I wish to remind us of perspectives--well known to traditionalists--that are overlooked and forgotten in the secular society. Again, by referring to the transcultural data, we are reminded that the latter half of life is not necessarily a period of loss and pathology; and that the potentials released by the ending of parenthood can, under facilitating psychosocial conditions, bring about certain restorations and vitalizations of the self that are the particular fruits of later life. Thus, we should not despair about our urban condition, or long for some unattainable rural past; rather, having reminded ourselves that developmental advances *are* possible after parenthood, we would do well to identify, strengthen, and expand those aspects of our own society that function, even within our secular context and limitations, so as to sponsor the beneficial developments of later life. And this final statement is not an optimistic flourish to round off my paper; we should remember that subcultural enclaves--ethnic and professional--do exist within our own society to activate the particular energies and talents of older individuals. After all, the most successful orderly revolution in American history was recently brought about by old lawyers, most of them in their seventies, who opposed--without regard for their careers or even their lives--a powerful President who had dared to tamper with the Constitution. Watergate was a revolution in the political sphere, engineered by old politicians who had found their energy and their identity in serving the sacred sphere, summed up for them by an idealized document, the Constitution. Again, the task of a secular society in regard to its older individuals is not to generate an infinite variety of medicines for their ills, but rather to identify,

create, and strengthen those structures that promote healing transformations, and thereby draw the sting from loss, from pain, and even from death.